

Paying their dues to society

Coffee Creek inmates nearing release now are working with Rotary on some of Wilsonville's biggest events

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By: [Josh Kulla](#)

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Photo By: Josh KullaInmates

from Coffee Creek Correctional Facility have helped Wilsonville Rotarians with set up on a number of public events this summer.

Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and the roughly 1,100 female inmates it houses have definitely become a part of the Wilsonville community.

For instance, a contingent appeared Friday at Town Center Park in Wilsonville, where they worked alongside volunteers from the Rotary Club of Wilsonville to help set up the elaborate infrastructure surrounding this year's Fun In The Park festival.

They also pitched in the previous weekend with set-up for the Wilsonville Kiwanis Kids Fun Run, and will do so next month in preparation for the Wilsonville Fall Food Festival.

"It's a tremendous help for us because of the people-power it takes to get all those canopies set up," said Becky Nichols, president of the Fun InThe Park planning committee. "We've tried to get different groups to work with us, but summers are hard for getting young people out to help. We're appreciative of anyone who gives us volunteer help."

It's part of an ever-increasing partnership between local Rotarians and the Oregon Department of Corrections, which earlier this year recognized Wilsonville resident and longtime Rotarian Doris Wehler for her outstanding volunteer work on behalf of inmates.

In years past, inmates have occasionally turned out to help with a single Rotary-sponsored event here and there. Now, however, that effort has been greatly expanded and local residents can expect to see a growing number of work opportunities for inmates who have earned the privilege of taking part.

"This is a unique arrangement that benefits both the community groups and the inmates," said Wheler. "It helps inmates integrate into the community and for the community to be aware of their efforts."

Fellow Rotarian John Ludlow is one of the masterminds behind the club's groundbreaking Through a Child's Eyes program at Coffee Creek, which brings children together with their incarcerated mothers for a unique event that is half picnic, half carnival. His experience organizing TACE and working with inmates setting up the premises, he said, led him to seek further cooperation with the Department of Corrections in creating work opportunities for the women at Coffee Creek.

"It's one of those things," Ludlow said. "We got Coffee Creek to help with the Arts Festival setting up tents two years ago. So now, we're putting together a proposal for them to work with us at the Fun Run, Fun in the Park, the Arts Festival, even the Fall Food Festival."

At the setup for the Fun Run, that effort showed signs of success, as a group of inmates, all of whom are approaching their release dates, put up tents, constructed inflatable water attractions and a sand pit. They continued last Friday at Town Center Park, working to erect the main stage and tent, along with over 130 other vendor booths and tents.

To gain the privilege of working outside the walls of Coffee Creek, the women first must be allowed to join the Physical Plant staff, whose members work inside the prison grounds, but outside the confines of either the medium- or minimum-security prison wings. Community service of the type carried out at the park is allowed only after a strict series of disciplinary goals are met and maintained.

"All of this is part of the accountability model," Ludlow said. "It gives these women a feeling of being accepted. It's amazing how it helps with their self-confidence. And it's helpful for us, too."

The Delphi Technique:

Correctional Administration and Community Consensus

By Peter Boghossian, Paula Myers and Gary Kilmer

Forming, sustaining and nurturing positive relationships with the community is becoming increasingly important for correctional administrators. Developing and fostering these relationships can be complicated, particularly if there are conflicting interests between community leaders and prison administrators. There are times when the desires of the community do not accord with the realities of managing a correctional institution, particularly given acute budget shortfalls. There are, however, ways to effectively navigate these complex relationships. This article details one technique, the Delphi Technique, that was used by the Prison Advisory Committee (PAC) for Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI) in Oregon. It will explain the Delphi Technique and show how corrections officials and/or community leaders can use it to help build pragmatic consensus among varying parties.¹

PAC and the Oregon DOC

Oregon state law mandates that PACs be formed for state prisons.² PACs have several functions and purposes (see Appendix A), but basically they serve as citizen groups that interface with the management team of a particular state prison on a wide range of issues. The fundamental mission of the CRCI PAC is "to enhance the effectiveness of CRCI by communicating with and advising CRCI administration on correctional issues affecting the community."³

The CRCI PAC has worked closely with management in forming and discharging specific objectives of the Oregon DOC. CRCI's PAC is made up of community leaders and organizers, citizen volunteers, state and county corrections officials, and CRCI staff. The only criterion for membership is that PAC members cannot be felons.

The Delphi Technique

The RAND Corp. originally developed the Delphi Technique as a way of forecasting or predicting the future.⁴ It has since been used in a wide range of disciplines, including education, land-use planning, transportation, social

service programming, business and even philosophy.⁵ Regardless of the domain in which it is used, the core idea behind the Delphi Technique is to obtain a reliable consensus of opinion among knowledgeable participants. Through several rounds of decision-making and voting, participants can continuously refine their ideas and ultimately reach agreement.

When it was created in the early 1970s, experts were contacted by mail and asked their opinion about a particular technology and where they saw the technology heading. The experts mailed in the questionnaires and those items that received fewer votes or lower scores were eliminated. The remaining items were sent out and voted on by the experts, and then the process was repeated. Ultimately, the items that survived the long systematic weeding out process became the consensus.

The Delphi Technique is a tool. There is no one right way to employ it, and a number of different variables need to be taken into consideration before using it in a corrections context. For example, if the Delphi Technique is used with a community board, then it must not be used to extend the authority and reach of the board beyond the rules of the institution. In the section below, a specific example will be given showing how the PAC at CRCI used the Delphi Technique to solve a problem collaboratively and to build a consensus.

Application

In late 2006, CRCI's PAC, in conjunction with the CRCI's management team, used the Delphi Technique to determine their goals for the upcoming year. The following details the specifics of the technique and the results (see Appendix B).

In the final PAC meeting of 2006, PAC members were instructed to bring two to six ideas that they would like to see the PAC focus on in the upcoming year. The next meeting occurred in the beginning of 2007. Everyone who was present, including the secretary, was considered a participant and thus had an equal voice in the deliberations.

All 15 members wrote down their ideas, in sentence format, on the whiteboard. There were approximately 50 ideas. Each member could then place checkmarks next to the three ideas he or she liked the most. If they wished, members could place one checkmark next to their own idea, and either use their remaining checkmarks on someone else's idea or not use them at all. Participants could not, however, checkmark the same idea more than once a round. With regard to content, in this initial stage a wide range of possible options were present, including increasing PAC membership, furthering academic partnerships with local universities, bringing in guest speakers to address the PAC on relevant issues, providing inmates 30 days from release with job interview training and holding a resource fair for inmates.

After every member placed checkmarks next to sentences on the board, the round ended. There were four rounds total. At the conclusion of each round, the group held a brief discussion with no time limits. During the discussion, there was a critical engagement on the pros and cons of the remaining ideas on the whiteboard, and the conversation lasted from one to 15 minutes.

At the end of the first round, 30 ideas were left on the board. The ideas that received no checkmarks were crossed out but remained readable on the board.⁶ The entire process was repeated three more times. The second time, 20 ideas remained; the third time, four ideas; and the final time, one idea. The final idea was a resource fair in which community organizations would come into the facility and provide various services to the inmates. This was the idea that was acted upon. The resource fair — CRCI's first — was held on Nov. 16, 2007. Various community organizations participated in the event, such as Central City Concern, Center for Family Success, Oregon Employment Department, Volunteers of America, DHS Self-Sufficiency and Home for Good in Oregon. Inmates reported to staff and volunteers that the information that was presented was "very helpful"; staff reported the event went smoothly; and volunteers commented on the high level of interest from inmates.

Advantages and Limitations

One advantage to the Delphi Technique, sometimes referred to as "collaborative decision-making," is that everyone present genuinely feels like they have a stake in the decision-making process — because they do.⁷ There is an entire body of research literature detailing the effectiveness and the increased likelihood of meeting a targeted outcome if participants feel that they have direct input into the formulation of the goal.⁸ The Delphi Technique allows for this input, regardless of a participant's position in the hierarchy and independent of his or her initial ideas. In the example given, the secretary, superintendent and chair of the PAC, as well as every other member, all had an equal voice in the deliberations. Moreover, even if — as it happened in this example — one or more individuals did not place a checkmark next to the consensus statement, at each step in the deliberative process there was an opportunity to voice one's opinion and to help shape the vote.

Despite being an effective tool for consensus-building and for promoting individual involvement, the Delphi Technique's potential drawbacks should be noted. First, it is possible that the technique could be used to bully participants into accepting a particular outcome.⁹ If, for example, a superintendent or a supervisor is unwavering in his or her support for a particular idea, it is certainly possible that glances and disapproving nods could dissuade participants — particularly employees new to the organization — from marking those ideas that they genuinely support. To avoid this, it is possible to conduct the process in secret, but then transparency would be lost, and with it many of the advantages of using the technique. While bullying and cajoling are certainly possible, they may be just as likely with other consensus building techniques. If one is unshakeable in one's convictions, then no technique that relies on consensus building and a collaborative approach to problem-solving will be effective.

Another drawback to the Delphi Technique is that those who do not participate do not have a voice in the discussion. It could be the case that community members who have a particular area of expertise are absent from the deliberations. In this case, it is likely that particular avenues of discourse would never emerge.¹⁰ To ensure diversity and inclusion, it is important that all individuals, particularly those with relevant skill sets, be invited to the deliberative process.

Conclusion

The Delphi Technique provides correctional managers and administrators with a tool to help build pragmatic consensus and to assist in forming collaborative relationships within organizations and with community representatives. It can be modified and adapted to a particular organization's needs with little effort. The technique is particularly helpful in building a consensus in difficult circumstances, and it can be used to foster positive, cooperative relationships.

ENDNOTES

¹ A consensus is defined as a general agreement among participants. Pragmatic consensus refers to a process in which the product of an inquiry can be defined in terms of the utility of its acceptance. In other words, the term pragmatic consensus is usually used when the outcome of a deliberation is uncertain, and the discussion that leads to that outcome is contentious or even fractious. It is easy to reach a consensus if all of the parties are in basic agreement. If, however, there is considerable disagreement about an issue, then pragmatic consensus means working with parties in disagreement to arrive at an outcome that may not be optimal, but one that is better than competing alternatives.

² Oregon Department of Corrections. Updated November 2009. Oregon Administrative Rules. *Division 200: Prison Advisory Committee*. Available at http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/rules/OARS_200/OAR_291/291_200.html.

³ Oregon Department of Corrections. Updated November 2008. *Operations Division: Columbia River Correctional Institution*. Available at http://www.oregon.gov/DOC/OPS/PRISON/crci_welcome.shtml#CRCI_Prison_Advisory_Committee.

⁴ Daley, Norman. 1969. *The Delphi Method: An Experimental Study of Group Opinion*. Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corp.

⁵ Andranovich, Greg. 1995. *Developing Community Participation and Consensus: The Delphi Technique*. Pullman: Washington State University, Western Regional Extension. Available at <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/wrep0131/wrep0131.html>. American Philosophical Association. 1990. Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction. *The Delphi Report*. Millbrae, Calif.: The California Academic Press. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED315423).

Hood, T.C. 1978. *Using the Delphi technique to set transportation research priorities*. Knoxville, Tenn.: Transportation Center, University of Tennessee.

⁶ The sentences should remain intact in the event of a dispute, or if a participant wishes to revisit an idea.

⁷ Morris, Keith. 1977. *The application of the Delphi technique to the development of productivity measures*. Columbus: Ohio State University Research Foundation.

⁸ Tiegerman-Farber, Ellen Morris and Christine Radziewicz. 1997. *Collaborative decision making: The pathway to inclusion*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Beyerlein, Michael, Susan Craig and Linda Moran. 2002. *Beyond teams: Building the collaborative organization*. San Francisco, Calif.: Pfeiffer.

⁹ Stuter, Lynn. 1998. Using the Delphi Technique to Achieve Consensus: How it is leading us away from representative government to an illusion of citizen participation. *Education Reporter*, Number 154. (November). Available at <http://www.eagleforum.org/educate/1998/nov98/focus.html>.

¹⁰ Recently, CRCI's PAC has had the privilege of adding an individual who advocates for veteran's rights. As a new member, he could have made valuable contributions to the process, but he was not yet a member when the goals for 2007 were established.

¹¹ This process can be modified, of course, depending on the number of individuals present and the time allotted. In some cases, it may be helpful to limit the number of checkmarks to two or to have fewer voting rounds. For exceptionally large events with 300 or more participants, facilitators should consider reducing the number of checkmarks for each round. This will help focus on an idea more quickly by eliminating sentences with fewer checkmarks. Also, if there is a disagreement about which items should be eliminated (that is, where the cutoff should be) always retain more rather than fewer items on the board. If there are more items on the board, then adding additional rounds will still yield a consensus statement.

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Appendix A.

Prison Advisory Committees: Functions and Purposes

1. When established, PACs shall:
 - (a) Serve as a citizen advisory group to the facility superintendents and designated department of corrections representatives regarding correctional issues, activities and practices affecting their community(ies).
 - (b) Promote open and effective communication between affected community(ies) and DOC officials during the life of the facility, from siting [sic] through operation and ultimate closure.
 - (c) Serve as a community-based conduit through which information is disseminated to and received from the public.
 - (d) Work in cooperation with the superintendent or other DOC staff to address specific issues that develop during the life of the facility.
 - (e) Assist the superintendent or other designated DOC staff in developing and promoting safe opportunities for the utilization of inmate labor.
 - (f) Work in cooperation with the superintendent or other designated DOC staff to promote, support and communicate the mission, vision and values of the department.
2. PACs shall not establish DOC policies, rules, internal management directives or procedures.

Appendix B.

Detailed Breakdown of the Delphi Technique As Used by the CRCI PAC

- One month before the Delphi Technique is used, participants are asked to bring two to six ideas that they would like to see implemented.¹¹
- During the meeting in which the Delphi Technique takes place, participants legibly write their ideas on a whiteboard.
- Members have a total of three checkmarks that they can place next to any of the ideas on the whiteboard.
- In each round, individuals can place only one checkmark next to their own idea.
- If someone does not wish to place any checkmarks, he or she is free to abstain.
- Cross out, but still keep readable, the ideas that received no checkmarks.
- Discussion.
- Round two: Repeat steps three, four and five.
- Round three: Repeat steps three, four and five.
- Round four: Repeat steps three, four and five.
- The consensus statement is the final idea that remains on the board.



Inmates trade denim for fairy costumes

Jennifer Colton Photo The cast of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" poses for photos after a performance at Two Rivers Correctional Institution on Saturday, Sept. 25. The production marked the second time a troupe of inmates has performed Shakespeare at the Umatilla County prison.

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By Jennifer Colton Hermiston Herald

Velvet and brocade draped bodies normally plastered with blue denim as a troupe of 16 inmates became Shakesperian actors last week at Two Rivers Correctional Institution.

"This is a very brave group. They are brave not only to do the play in the first place, but they have had the perseverance to keep it going," director Johnny Stallings said. "I'm very pleased at the quality of the performance and also the enthusiastic reception from the audience."

Since April, Stallings has worked with inmates in the medium security units of the prison to bring "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to life, complete with props and costumes.

"I took a tour of this prison and volunteered my services," he said. "Once I got inside, I started meeting the guys, and I was intrigued. I have really enjoyed my time here."

Three years ago, Stalling's direction of "Hamlet" at TRCI was the first full performance of Shakespeare by inmates in an Oregon state prison; "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is the second.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" follows three interwoven story lines: the marriage of a king queen, a play presented for the weddings by local artisans and the love lives of two men and two women as they become entangled in a spat between fairies.

Although the play includes female characters and an all-male cast, the actors add a level of authenticity to the performance: In Shakespeare's time, only men were permitted to become actors.

For Aaron Gilbert, who took on the role of Helena, one of the hardest parts of the play was getting past the prison's unwritten code of behavior.

"You don't touch people, you don't get in people's faces, and with this play, sometimes you have to," he said. "After we got comfortable with it, it was great, and it added a whole other dimension to the play."

Aaron O'Hara, who plays Bottom, notorious for being cursed with a donkey's head during one act of the play, agreed.

"In this place, you have an image that you have to keep up," he said, adding he almost quit the production at times. "I saw some of these guys and they would say, 'You can't drop out buddy, we need you.' After some encouragement, I decided to stay."

Many of the group joined the production through involvement with Stalling's weekly dialogue program, a class the volunteer director has led for four years. O'Hara, who described himself as a previous trouble-maker, said having the group dialogue sessions and working with the play forced him to open up, even when he didn't want to talk, a process which in turn changed his behavior outside of the group.

"I didn't even realize my way of thinking was changing," he said. "Without this group, without the play, I would have been back in the hole. Now I have 18 months of clear conduct."

While acting in prison added its own level of difficulty, some of the challenges the inmates faced plague actors at all levels.

"People were really counting on me because Oberon is a really big piece of the play, but I really didn't want to continue, because I was so slow and so far behind," actor Bradley Foote said. "I kept worrying about going to group and having Johnny say, 'Have you learned anything this week?'"

Foote first learned of the dialogue group after watching Stallings perform a monologue on silence.

"I ended up going to the group, and I've enjoyed it. It's been really, really good for me to go down there every week and talk," he said.

Many of the actors spoke positively of the weekly hour of dialogue and the hours of play practice.

“An hour to us is like an eternity. We don’t want that (time) to end because for three hours, we are not in this place,” Steve Jamison, “Lysander,” said.

Months of practice culminated over the last two weeks as the cast has performed for hundreds of other inmates and specially invited guests, friends and relatives. The final performance takes place tonight.

As the final lines of the play fade and the imaginary curtain drops, the cast participates in a question-and-answer session with the audience. When asked by an audience member if they would participate in another play, each of the actors raised his hand.

“I think we all had a wonderful opportunity to learn about teamwork,” Jamison said. “We all needed everyone here, and we encouraged everyone. We did that out of a sense of teamwork, a sense of unity to create something bigger than ourselves, and I think that’s what we did. It was really meaningful to all of us. I live for that every week. It’s been a really neat experience all around.”

Coffee Creek inmates build a 'recycled' greenhouse

Soda bottles form the walls of this unique structure in Wilsonville

By: [Josh Kulla](#) Published: 10/11/2010



Photo By: Josh Kulla Bottle greenhouse

A group of inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility saved employee pop bottles to build this greenhouse near their organic garden.

At first it seemed like a joke. But not for long. What began as a laugh ultimately turned into a wildly successful solution to an expensive problem for a group of inmates at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility.

While they were determined to construct a greenhouse to compliment the prison's thriving, inmate-run organic garden, inmates working in the prison's physical plant discovered they could spend up to \$20,000 on materials and other costs involved with a traditional structure.

"We wanted to build a greenhouse out here, but the cost involved was way too high," said Susan Marlin, Coffee Creek's facility maintenance supervisor. "It was not feasible; it was a dream."

But another maintenance staff member went online and quickly found an answer to their quandary.

Using a wooden framework and walls made from discarded plastic soda bottles, a group of students in the United Kingdom had constructed a functional greenhouse and posted photos and other information online. The Coffee Creek staffer, who declined to be identified because of security concerns, told the Spokesman the idea caused him and others in the physical plant to chuckle.

"I found this site from the U.K.," said the staff member. "And it was made by kids from a school, so when I found it, it was like a joke; 'here's what Coffee Creek can afford.'"

The idea of using recycled soda bottles to construct greenhouses emerged in recent years in Europe and has since spread to Canada and the United States. Plastic bottles are one of the single largest sources of pollution in the world, and make up an integral part of the infamous plastic "islands" found floating in the South Pacific Ocean and other areas.

At Coffee Creek, the inmates might have laughed at first, but they quickly forged ahead and started planning their structure.

They actually lacked for a source of plastic bottles at first, until prison staff stepped forward and agreed to donate all the 20-ounce soda bottles recycled from employee vending machines. That

quickly allowed them to gather the 5,200 bottles which ultimately ended up in the greenhouse. The total cost of the greenhouse probably did not exceed \$200.

"I remember you (Marlin) coming in and going 'We have our winter project,'" said inmate Nichole Carter, who is serving a 54-month sentence for aggravated theft.

That was last November.

Inmates involved in the project came from those assigned to work under supervision in the physical plant, which allows them to work outside the minimum-security residential wing. Those in medium-security don't qualify to work in the physical plant. Those who do also must be within 48 months of being released.

Those requirements are similar to those governing participation in most of Coffee Creek's educational or vocational programs. Physical plant workers, however, are often allowed to brainstorm and innovate, as was the case with the greenhouse.

"We really wanted to grow flower starts," Marlin said. "We thought maybe we could get those donated, the seeds and containers for the flowers - if we had a greenhouse."

Starting last January, the project took shape over the following six months. Wooden studs for the framework of the greenhouse came from a dismantled deck that came from a training building at Coffee Creek, eliminating one of the few other significant costs. Concrete mix left over from other maintenance projects also came in handy.

"We kind of started looking around at what we had here," Marlin said. "And it started coming together."

With plans now in hand, inmates cut the bottoms off the thousands of bottles needed to fill in the walls and roof of the greenhouse. They then placed the bottles on top of each other and threaded PVC piping through the middle. These were then cut to the desired length and placed together vertically. Each segment of wall can easily be popped in and out of place for repair or replacement.

"It was a lot of fun," said inmate Jill Latzinger, who is serving out a 34-month sentence after being convicted of selling methamphetamine. "I'm planning on going to college to study construction at Portland Community College in the fall now, and I liked the design and way we did it. All of it was fun."

The first crop of starts planted last spring included Bell peppers and other vegetables, as well as the flowers sought by Marlin. Once they grew big enough, they were transferred to the organic garden or harvested in the case of the Petunias and other flowers grown over the summer.

Carter said she's more used to working in an office than with her hands. But she found she enjoyed the change, as well as the confidence boost.

"I'm usually in an office," she said. "So to be able to build something with tools or just standing on a ladder and being able to hit a nail, it felt great. It's rewarding to know that what we did build will help bring smiles to people's faces in a very gloomy environment for years to come."

<http://www.wilsonvillespokesman.com/news/2010/October/11/Community/coffee.creek.inmates.build.a.recycled.greenhouse/news.aspx>

